

A final plan for California's bay-delta system must assure reliable water supplies for the state's citizens and not impose unfair burdens on farmers and rural residents, California Farm Bureau President Bill Pauli said today.

Governor Davis and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt released details of a plan to be implemented by a joint state-federal effort known as Cal-Fed. The plan directs the Cal-Fed agencies on efforts to correct water-supply, water-quality and environmental problems in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and San Francisco Bay.

"We appreciate the governor's hard work to negotiate with the federal government for a water plan that meets California's needs," Pauli said. "Farm Bureau will continue to strive to assure the final Cal-Fed actions provide adequate and reliable water for California's people while achieving environmental goals."

Pauli said Farm Bureau has questions about how the plan will affect farmers, ranchers and rural residents.

"Most of the plan appears driven by federal environmental goals and decisions," he said. "We need to make sure local and state leaders don't lose control of California's water. Those decisions must be made here, not by federal fishery and environmental regulators."

Pauli said California should move quickly to address the imbalance between water supply and demand.

"The plan establishes aggressive goals for farm and urban water conservation and recycling which apparently will need to be met as conditions for future storage. But who will determine whether those goals make sense and when they have been reached? Progress on much-needed storage should move forward at the same pace as progress on the environment," Pauli said.

User fees will pay for components of the Cal-Fed plan. Pauli said that aspect will trouble farmers and ranchers.

"User fees may raise farmers' water rates, which will ultimately affect the cost of California-grown products," he said.

A new "environmental water account" in the Cal-Fed plan would purchase at least 380,000 acre-feet of water per year. Pauli said Cal-Fed must demonstrate that the water is used efficiently in helping species.

He also expressed concern about Cal-Fed's continuing acquisition of agricultural land, which affects the state's rural economy and eliminates jobs.

"Cal-Fed should be discouraged from removing land and water from agricultural production, and encouraged to conduct its habitat restoration on existing government-owned land," Pauli said.

"Farm Bureau must be assured these issues are resolved before Cal-Fed finalizes its plans," he said.

The California Farm Bureau Federation is the state's largest farm organization, with more than 85,000 members.